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SUBJECT: Guangzhou -- A Hub for the Illegal Drug Trade

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: In an unusually candid late July meeting, senior provincial and municipal anti-drug officers briefed Poloff on the rising tide of drug trafficking in Guangdong Province. Centered on Guangzhou, growing numbers of foreign drug dealers and traffickers -- many from Africa and the Middle East -- are using the city's developed transportation and logistics networks to import narcotics and distribute them to other parts of China. Traffickers enjoy a linguistic advantage and employ various techniques to elude investigators. Chinese anti-drug forces continue to look abroad for ways to improve intelligence collection and training. END SUMMARY

Guangdong: A Place for Drugs

¶2. (SBU) Yang Jiang Hua, Director General of the Narcotics Control Bureau, Guangdong Public Security Department (PSD), and Cui Ran, Department Chief of the Drug Crimes Investigation Division of the Guangzhou Public Security Bureau (PSB), told Poloff that Guangdong province is home to one-seventh of China's users of illegal drugs. Official estimates for the province put the number at 100,000 people. Approximately half are local residents, and the rest are migrant workers from the province's "floating population."

The Business of Drugs

¶3. (SBU) Both Yang and Cui asserted that most of the province's drug dealers come from Africa and the Middle East and that the number of foreigners involved in the drug trade here doubled last year. (NOTE: Yang and Cui could not recall any recent arrests of U.S. citizens for drug trafficking in Guangdong province. END NOTE.) These traffickers commonly purchase heroin from the Golden Crescent or from South-East Asia, then transfer the drugs via Thailand to Hong Kong, Macau and Guangzhou. The two officials described the most popular methods of transporting narcotics into China as the following:

-- "Bodypacking;" where individuals ("mules") swallow drugs packaged in balloons or condoms, which are then evacuated from the body after arriving in China. An extreme example of this was the 1,600 grams (more than three and a half pounds) of drugs swallowed by one African man. The officials noted that at least one Nigerian had died from an overdose after one of the packets he had swallowed ruptured.

In an attempt to lower the profile of their drug mules, traffickers in Guangdong are now hiring female travelers from the Philippines and Thailand to do the work.

-- Smuggling in the luggage of travelers, particularly individuals on "business" or "vacation" travel.

-- Mailing parcels through the international postal system. For example, one group of traffickers mailed narcotics from Dubai to Guangzhou, where an accomplice hired a local Chinese girl to receive the package.

¶4. (SBU) Yang and Cui said that foreign traders of illegal drugs in Guangzhou enjoy a linguistic advantage in avoiding detection. Local and provincial police are often thwarted by the traffickers' use of African tribal languages, such as Ibo, for which the Guangdong PSD does not have translators or interpreters. In addition, the two officials noted that because business is conducted primarily with fellow Africans or Middle Easterners, it is difficult for ethnic Chinese officials to penetrate these groups.

¶5. (SBU) Organizational models used by the traffickers also pose a challenge for police. For example, the smuggling, processing, and distribution aspects of the business are each handled by discreet cells. This compartmentalization affords additional protection to the traffickers and dealers, since those who are arrested and interrogated only have limited knowledge of the overall operation.

¶6. (SBU) Yang predicted that drug traffickers would increasingly exploit Guangzhou's well-developed transportation system and historical status as a nexus for international and domestic trade to transport large quantities of narcotics.

Not Everything Comes from Abroad

¶7. (SBU) In addition, Yang and Cui told Poloff that domestically-produced drugs are also present in Guangdong Province. Guangzhou reportedly produces a significant quantity of the

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methamphetamine "Ice," which traffickers from the Middle East and Iran smuggle to other countries and to other parts of China. The officials also said Ephedrine was produced in Guangdong and many other places in China.

Close International Cooperation

¶8. (SBU) Under the direction of the Ministry of Public Security in Beijing, the Guangdong Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) has worked closely with counterparts from Australia, Canada, Hong Kong, Macau, Thailand and the United States. This cooperation has taken various forms, including training, joint law enforcement operations, and intelligence sharing. Yang highlighted the importance of intelligence sharing in anti-narcotics work. He cited the "0303A" case, in which police in Guangzhou and Canada -- assisted by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) and Panamanian authorities -- arrested a total of ten suspects and seized 25 kilograms of cocaine in January 2007. According to Yang, DEA, which provided accurate intelligence and professional guidance during the case, deserved most of the credit for the operation's success.

"I would rather work with the United States"

¶9. (SBU) Both Guangdong and Guangzhou NCBs praised the efficiency and professionalism of DEA agents. Yang pointed out that the Guangdong NCB received five pieces of useful information from the United States in 2006 that led to successful operations in the province. Also, in late 2006, DEA agents traveled to Guangdong and participated in a joint operation to crack a "big drug case."

¶10. (SBU) In contrast with the practical work style of U.S. officials, Cui complained that it is much harder to work with Canadian counterparts. He commented that the Canadian government was slow to provide assistance when its citizens were involved in drug crimes. Attributing this reluctance to Canada's official opposition to the death penalty, Cui said he regards citizen-protection policies as the biggest barrier to international anti-narcotics cooperation.

Structure of the Guangdong Narcotics Control Bureau

¶11. (SBU) Founded in August 2005, the Guangdong NCB falls under the Public Security Department and consists of four main sections -- Administrative, Intelligence, Investigations, and Drug Rehabilitation. While the Guangdong NCB exercises jurisdiction over relatively few cases (perhaps one or two a year), it supplies human resources and technical support, information and intelligence support, and interagency coordination to its subordinated NCBs at the municipal level. It also provides training for anti-narcotics police officers from 21 cities in Guangdong Province.

The Future

¶12. (SBU) As the logistics industry develops, the Guangdong NCB is keeping a closer eye on emerging cross-border drug trafficking techniques. The need for better actionable intelligence has already spurred plans for more investment in the agency's anti-narcotics information gathering apparatus and staff training. Director General Yang affirmed his commitment to strengthening the anti-narcotics campaign in Guangdong and working more closely with foreign counterparts under the leadership of China's Ministry of Public Security. He re-emphasized that China takes drug crimes seriously, and suggested that increased dialogue would be key to the success of future international cooperation.

¶13. (U) The DEA representative in Beijing and RSO Guangzhou have reviewed this cable.

JACOBSEN